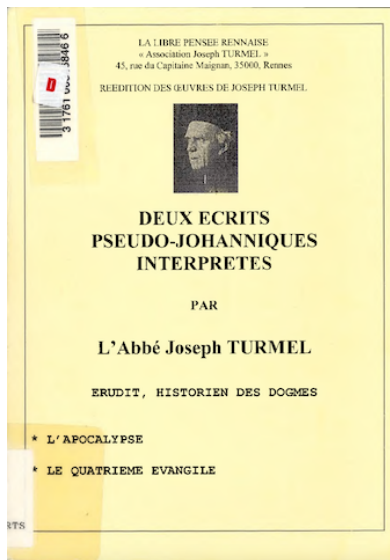


This file was created October 2021 as a translation for my personal use and without any thought of sharing publicly at the time. I only ask that you keep that in mind when using it. I have used the 2003 republication of these two works (1925 and 1938) by Turmel for the basis of this file:

- Turmel, Joseph. *Deux Écrits Pseudo-Johanniques Interprétés*. Edited by M. Le Normand. Rennes: Libre pensée rennaise, 2003.

Neil Godfrey - November 2023



3

PRESENTATION OF THE WORK

by M. Le Normand, LP 35

In all of his work, Abbot Joseph Turmel speaks very little about the Apocalypse; as for the Fourth Gospel, only one study is devoted to it, under the name of Henri Delafosse, in 1925, by Rieder in the collection “Les textes du Chrétienne” directed by P-L Couchoud. The first of these two texts was probably little distributed because it was published shortly before the start of the Second World War. This is why, having not seen anyone mention a text by Turmel on the Apocalypse, I was very surprised when I discovered, in the diocesan library of Rennes, a small work (45p.), bearing this title, written by him and published by Rieder in 1938, without mention of Couchoud's collection. An avid and enthusiastic reading taught me that the usual theses of critics since the 19th century,

stemming from the work of the German school of Tubingen, and excellently presented by Renan in *Antichrist*, taken up by Couchoud in 1930, were not at all those of our learned scholar. Engels, in 1894, in "Contributions to the history of primitive Christianity", translated by Laura Lafargue for publication in "LE DEVENIR SOCIAL", theoretical organ of the 2nd International in French, had nevertheless been fully convinced by the work of Renan, as evidenced by the following passage which clearly presents the state of the question of biblical studies at the end of the 19th century:

"German biblical criticism, hitherto the only scientific basis for our knowledge of the history of early Christianity, has followed a double trend.

One of these trends is represented by the Tubingen school, to which, in a broader sense, D. F. Strauss also belongs. She also goes far in critically examining the gospels that are not eyewitness reports, but later reworkings of lost writings, and that at most four of the epistles attributed to St. Paul are authentic. It crosses out, as inadmissible, from the historical narrative, all the miracles and all the contradictions; from what remains it seeks to save everything that is savable, and in this its character as a theological school shines through. And it is thanks to this school that Renan, who is largely based on it, was able, by applying the same method, to carry out many other rescues. In addition to a number of more than doubtful narrations from the New Testament, he wants to impose on us quantities of legends of martyrdoms as authenticated [or authenticated - the term has disappeared - transcriber's note] historically. In any case, everything that the Tubingen school rejects from the New Testament as apocryphal or as not being historical can be considered definitively rejected by science.

4

The other trend is represented by one man: Bruno Bauer. His great merit is to have boldly criticized the Gospels and the Apostolics, to have been the first to proceed seriously in the examination, not only of the Jewish and Greco-Alexandrian elements, but also of the Greek and Greco-Roman elements which opened Christianity the way to the universal religion. The legend of Christianity born from scratch from Judaism, starting from Palestine to conquer the world by means of dogmatics and ethics defined in broad terms, has become impossible since Bauer; from now on it will at most be able to continue to vegetate in the theological faculties and in the minds of people who want to "preserve religion for the people", even at the cost of science. In the formation of Christianity, as it was elevated to the rank of state religion by Constantine, the school of Philo of Alexandria, and the vulgar Greco-Roman, platonic and notably stoic philosophy, had their large part. . This part is far from being established in detail, but the fact is

demonstrated, and this is, in a preponderant way, the work of Bruno Bauer; he laid the foundations of the proof that Christianity was not imported from outside, from Judea, and imposed on the Greco-Roman world, but that it is, at least in the form it took as a religion universal, the very special product of this world. Naturally, in this work Bauer went far beyond his goal, as happens to all those who combat inveterate prejudices. With the intention of showing the influence of Philo, and especially of Seneca, on nascent Christianity, even from a literary point of view, and of formally representing the authors of the New Testament as plagiarists of these philosophers, he is obliged to delay the appearance of the new religion half a century ago, to reject the contrary reports of Roman historians, and, in general, to take serious liberties with received history. According to him, Christianity, as such, only appeared under the Flavian emperors, New Testament literature only under Hadrian, Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius. In this way, all historical background for the New Testament narratives relating to Jesus and his disciples disappears in Bauer; they resolve themselves into legends where the internal development phases and the soul conflicts of the first communities are attributed to more or less fictitious people. Neither Galilee nor Jerusalem, but Alexandria and Rome are, according to Bauer, the places of birth of the new religion.

5

Consequently, if the Tübingen school in the residue, uncontested by it, of the history and literature of the New Testament, offered us the extreme maximum of what science can, even today, allow to pass as a controversial subject, Bruno Bauer brings us the maximum of what she can attack. Between these limits lies the truth. That this, with our current means, is likely to be determined, seems very problematic. New discoveries, notably in Rome, in the East and above all in Egypt, will contribute much more to this than any criticism.

Now, there is in the New Testament only one book of which it is possible, within a few months, to fix the date of writing; which must have been written between June 67 and January or April 68, a book which, consequently, belongs to the very first Christian times, which reflects its notions with the most naive sincerity and in a corresponding idiomatic language; which, therefore, is in my opinion more important in determining what primitive Christianity really was than the rest of the New Testament, much later in date in its current wording. This book is the so-called Apocalypse of John; and as, moreover, this book, apparently the most obscure in the entire Bible, has today become, thanks to German criticism, the most understandable and the most transparent of all, I ask to tell the reader about it.

6

It is enough to take a look at this book to be convinced of the state of exaltation of the author and of the "ambient environment" in which he lived. Our "Apocalypse" is not the only one of its kind and of its time. From the year 164, before our era, whence dates the first which has been preserved to us the so-called book of Daniel, until approximately 250 of our era, the approximate date of the Carmen of Commodien, Renan counts no less than 15 classic "Apocalypses" that have reached us, not to mention later imitations. (I cite Renan because his book is the most accessible and best known outside professional circles). It was a time when in Rome and Greece, but even more so in Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, a disparate mixture of the crassest superstitions of all countries was accepted without examination, and supplemented by pious frauds and a direct charlatanism, where thaumaturgy, convulsions, visions, divination of the future, alchemy, kabbalah and other occult witchcraft played the leading role. This was the atmosphere in which early Christianity took birth, and this in the midst of a class of people who, more than any other, were open to these supernatural imaginations. Also the Christian Gnostics of Egypt, as, among other things, the Leyden papyri prove, were, in the second century of the Christian era, strongly devoted to alchemy, and they incorporated notions alchemists in their doctrines. And the Chaldean and Jewish mathematicians who, according to Tacitus, were twice, under Claudius and again under Vitellius, expelled from Rome for magic, they exercised no other geometric arts than those which we will find at the very heart of the Apocalypse of John.

7

Added to this is the fact that all apocalypses recognize the right to deceive their readers. Not only, as a general rule, are they written by people completely other than their alleged authors, for the most part more modern, for example the book of Daniel, the book of Enoch, the Apocalypses of Ezra, of Baruch, of Jude, etc., the sibylline books, but basically they only prophesy things that happened a long time ago and are perfectly known to the true author. This is how in the year -164, shortly before the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, the author of the book of Daniel had Daniel, supposed to live, at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, predict the ascendancy and the decline of the dominion of Persia and Macedonia, and the beginning of the world empire of Rome, with a view to predisposing his readers, by this evidence of his prophetic gifts, to accept his final prophecy: that the people of Israel will overcome all its tribulations and will finally be victorious. If therefore the Apocalypse of John were really the work of the alleged author, it would constitute the only exception in apocalyptic literature.

John, who gives himself as the author, was in any case a man highly regarded among the Christians of Asia Minor. The tone of the epistles to the seven communities guarantees this. It could therefore be that it was the apostle

John, whose historical existence, if not absolutely authenticated, is at least very probable. And if this apostle was indeed the author, it would only be so much the better for our thesis. This would be the best proof that the Christianity of this book is the real, true primitive Christianity. It is proven, by the way, that Revelation does not come from the same author as the Gospel or the three epistles also attributed to John. »

Paul-Louis Couchoud had taken up in 1930, in the “Christianity” collection, a new translation of the Apocalypse, which took up the conception of Renan and the Germans, the situation now seemed well established, this text constituted for everyone the oldest Christian text, undoubtedly dated 69. Tunnel's pamphlet upsets the general consensus with very convincing arguments. Wouldn't this be the main reason, with the Second World War nearby, which would explain the total blackout on this nevertheless crucial work? Indeed, if the Apocalypse is indeed by the apostle John, as even Engels seems to concede, then the life of Jesus as told by the Gospel could well contain some truths.

8

For Tunnel, who wants to conjecture some realities about the existence of Jesus, it is surely not on the basis of pseudo-Johannic writings. His analysis of the text of Revelation attributed to John clearly proves that it was written in Hebrew during the last of the Jewish wars against the Roman Empire, fought by Bar Kochba against the Emperor Hadrian, between 132 and 135. The Christian veneer was only added much later, essentially to ensure that the “Fourth Gospel” had a Johannine origin.

This Gospel according to John was very controversial by German and Protestant critics in the 19th century. Renan, in an appendix to “The Life of Jesus”, returns to these historical and theological controversies, apparently without convincing anyone. In 1903 Loisy published a “Fourth Gospel” which largely invalidated Renan's theses. Turmel, for his part, starts from the results of criticism and therefore from Loisy and Réville and sets out to seek the origins of the fourth gospel. The results of his research will lead him straight to Marcion. He took up the method he had invented for the study of the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch, and applied it with the same success to the epistles of Paul, each time clearly finding the hand of the Marcionite school, then the Catholic and Montanist corrections. Critics, including Loisy, will find that these allegations, which they had not detected, are exaggerated and even obsessive. But in 1938, Loisy in History and myth

about Jesus Christ, a controversial book with Couchoud, who had criticized his historicist thesis on Jesus by opposing a thesis reducing the appearance of the founder to the formation of a pure myth, admitted a long Catholic then Marcionite interpolation in the Epistle to the Romans (1.18-111, 26), without saying that he took it from Turmel, whom he had also mocked on this subject. Reading this work by Loisy shows that the controversies were very lively between these learned exegetes who were successively the main editors of Turmel, before and after the excommunication. We understand that although in scientific disagreement with one or the other of his main publishers, our comrade only published some of his theses discreetly. The war and then his death did not help matters.

9

In terms of secularism and materialism, it should be noted that only Turmel took unambiguous positions, both anticlerical and antireligious.

We have therefore brought together in this volume Turmel's work on the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel. These are two writings that are relatively easy to read, however, for the first, the author had not produced an original translation to refer to while reading. We therefore followed his text with a composite version of the Apocalypse, in which we inserted the sentences cited by Turmel in his commentary.